

**Amendments to the Claims**

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings, of claims in the application:

**Listing of Claims:**

1. (Currently amended) A method of optical imaging of vulnerable atherosclerotic plaque of an animate subject involving administering an ~~A~~ optical imaging contrast agent with affinity for an abnormally expressed biological target associated with vulnerable atherosclerotic plaque, wherein said biological target is selected from: matrix metalloproteinase 9, Toll-like receptors, scavenger receptors, oxidized LDL, oxidation products of lipids and their adducts with protein, angiotensin II receptors and collagens.

~~2.~~ (Currently amended) The method ~~A contrast agent~~ as claimed in claim 1 wherein the contrast agent has a molecular weight is below 14,000 Daltons.

3. (Currently amended) The method ~~A contrast agent~~ as claimed in claim 1 wherein the contrast agent is of formula I



wherein V is one or more vector moieties having affinity for the ~~an~~ abnormally expressed target in vulnerable atherosclerotic plaque as defined in claim 1, L is a linker moiety or a bond and R is one or ~~one~~ more reporter moieties detectable in optical imaging.

4. (Currently amended) The method ~~A contrast agent~~ as claimed in claim 1, where the contrast agent comprises ~~comprising~~ a contrast agent substrate, wherein the target is an abnormally expressed enzyme, such that the contrast agent changes pharmacodynamic properties and/or pharmacokinetic properties upon a chemical modification from a contrast agent substrate to a contrast agent product upon a specific enzymatic transformation.

5. (Canceled)

6. (Currently amended) The method ~~A contrast agent~~ as claimed in claim 3 wherein V is selected from peptides, peptoid moieties, oligonucleotides, oligosaccharides, fat-related compounds, and traditional organic drug-like small molecules.

Appl. No. 10/582,680  
Amdt. Dated April 9, 2009  
Reply to Office action of December 9, 2008

7. (Currently amended) The method ~~A contrast agent~~ as claimed in claim 3 wherein R is a dye that interacts with light in the wavelength region from the ultraviolet to the near-infrared part of the electromagnetic spectrum.

8. (Currently amended) The method of claim 1 where the ~~A pharmaceutical composition for optical imaging of vulnerable atherosclerotic plaque comprising~~ a contrast agent is provided as a pharmaceutical composition as defined in claim 1 together with at least one pharmaceutically acceptable carrier or excipient.

9. (Canceled)

10. (Canceled)

11. (Currently amended) The method as claimed in claim ~~14~~ 10 for the diagnosis of vulnerable atherosclerotic plaque, for follow up of the progress of vulnerable atherosclerotic plaque development, for follow up of treatment of vulnerable atherosclerotic plaque or for surgical guidance.

12. (Canceled)

13. (Canceled)